

## Hunter 141

### Chapter 141: Mana Bolt

Jake sat on a small cloud away from the large continent. The bird perched in a tree beside him. He was breathing heavily still from his nearly empty pool of mana and low stamina. Even his health was only at around half.

The cloud elemental was far harder to deal with than he had predicted. Luckily the hawk did wonders against it. Its blades of wind cut off parts of the cloud elemental, with another blast of wind dispersing the cut-off part into nothing.

Even then, it took the two of them nearly half an hour before the elemental became unable to regenerate parts of its body and finally died. Or dispersed... or whatever elementals do.

Jake felt pretty damn fucking useless after the long fight. All he could really do was toss weak bolts of dark mana at the elemental to distract it while dodging its blows. If the elemental hadn't been so stupid as to focus on him over the hawk, he wasn't even sure they would have won.

He did throw a mana potion to the hawk during the fight, so he had made some kind of contribution. The hawk didn't even seem very condescending after the battle. Maybe surprised at Jake's many means to stay alive.

It made him reflect on the massive skill disparity between beasts and humans once more. Even the dungeon bosses he fought never had more than a handful of skills he was aware of. Humans, on the other hand, had so many.

Granted, many skills of beasts you never discovered. So maybe beasts just had a lot more passive skills or skills that buffed other parts of them. Or perhaps they just had fewer skills and more stats. Maybe they were slightly inferior in the skill department by the system's design. Who knows?

Probably Villy. Gotta ask him next time. Or maybe he could just ask out loud, and the scaly god would hear him. He had been spying on him at random times these days, after all. At least he had been nice enough not to have any more viewing parties.

"Hawkie, let's just stick to hunting birds and leave those damn clouds alone for now, yeah?" he asked, looking up at the bird.

He was pretty sure it understood him as it blinked its eyes a few times in a row in response. At least he believed it understood as it was clearly brilliant. The only question was if it understood him due to its intelligence or if the translation skill he got worked with birds. Though he doubted it as he had yet to hear anything speak that wasn't humanoid.

As for why he called it Hawkie... well, he just got tired of thinking of it as 'the hawk,' or when he occasionally talked to it, he wanted to give it some kind of name. Granted, Hawkie was a shitty name, but he had never claimed to be good at naming things.

Closing his eyes while sitting and resting on the cloud, he entered meditation. But this time, he didn't focus on pure recovery or summoned his usual strings of mana, but instead, he cupped his hands in front of him.

Despite his plan to avoid the elementals, it didn't mean that he was satisfied with the situation. He wanted to create a tool to fight them.

He had Sagacity of the Malefic Viper that helped him. He had been practicing controlling and using mana continuously ever since he got the ability to sense it. Yet, he found himself so disappointingly useless when he had to use it in combat.

Looking back, he was beginning to regret not just picking up the Dark Bolt skill at some point. Maybe instead of the still useless Hunter's Tracking skill. Not because of the Dark Bolt itself, but because of what he could potentially learn from it.

Something was missing from his mana attacks. He knew that his spells had to be more powerful even without a skill being used. He saw the many birds fire off basic-looking bolts of mana to kill the elementals, and he, for the life of him, didn't understand what separated his from theirs.

The amount of mana packed within the bolts wasn't the issue. Even when Jake used more, it barely did anything. When he made the mana into dark-affinity, it at least did something, if still incredibly ineffective.

Though he did have one way of attacking with pure mana. The enchantment on his gloves fired off a melee blast of mana. But even that was useless with his current predicament. What he did to use that was just to pour mana into the gloves, and it would fire out the mana in a blast of kinetic energy.

Touch of the Malefic Viper didn't serve to help him either. He understood how that skill worked, and it was clearly fundamentally different. It didn't use mana to attack but to fuel the poison it released upon touch.

He did briefly consider if he could somehow pour the effects of Touch of the Malefic Viper into a ball of mana and throw it, which is when he learned how futile that thought was. Unless the skill changed entirely, that would never work.

The skill required touch, as the name suggested. For a connection to form between the two entities involved - him, the poisoner, and his target, the poisoned. Not that he knew how to in any way replicate the effects of the skill without actually using it. He was fully aware of how far above his understanding it was, being a part of the Malefic Viper's legacy and all.

Had he gone wrong in his entire approach to manipulating mana? So far, he had focused on making those strings. Practiced lifting stones and other objects through mana and otherwise just used it to move things or attach himself to something.

He remembered how he had attached himself to a ceiling during the Forgotten Sewers dungeon. How he could cover his feet in mana to walk on water. He was proud of those achievements, but was his philosophy behind doing so flawed in some conceptual way?

Doubt only kept spreading in his mind as he sat in meditation. The effect of increased concentration from the skill upgrade was doing as much harm as good. If he was wrong in his approach to using mana, what about his way of using stamina? His alchemy?

Was there anything he could be genuinely sure of? He knew that even when the system gave a skill, it didn't necessarily mean one was on the right track. When he failed and exploded his own arm by overloading it with stamina, he was rewarded with a skill choice - one that was just terrible.

He quickly tried to quench his doubt concerning alchemy first. Gods had observed him doing it, and he had gotten a strong profession-upgrade. He could make powerful potions and had acquired so many powerful skills. Even if his path in that regard was suboptimal, it was still good enough.

Borrowing from the confidence in his alchemy, he thought about all the methods he used mana there. Brewing potions and concocting poisons were reliant on the skills associated with those actions. He wasn't even sure if it was possible to do either without the skills. If it was, that too was way beyond his paygrade.

Touch of the Malefic Viper he had already gone over.

Sagacity of the Malefic Viper helped him understand some things better, but it didn't come with any knowledge or sudden enlightenment on how to use mana offensively. It would help him, but in the end, it was just a supplementary tool.

Blood of the Malefic Viper was out too. It transformed his blood to do harm, but everything that skill did was also just far too complicated. He knew it had weird interactions with the vital energy in his body, but that was just what his instincts told him.

The wings didn't really provide any hints either. Even the ability to burn the blood in the wings was entirely based on Blood of the Malefic Viper and his Alchemical Flame.

Speaking of the Flame, that too didn't really help anything. All it did was to create a transparent flame of pure mana. Jake had tested its offensive might long ago, and it was pretty much non-existent. The flame produced heat, which could be viewed as offensive, but it was a skill clearly made for crafting and not fighting.

Like the difference between heat in a furnace and an explosion, it was far too stable to be viewed as any kind of attack.

Then there was Palate of the Malefic Viper. It was a skill associated with knowledge of alchemical ingredients he consumed while also amplifying the effects of his creations on himself. He couldn't see how that could... wait.

His thoughts wandered to the Trial of Myriad Poisons. When he was within the vat of poisons, they invaded his body repeatedly - to the point that he struggled with the pain and staying conscious. But more importantly, he replayed his efforts to absorb the toxins.

Back then, he had sought to break down the ingredients. Rip them apart with his mana to absorb them easier. He had tapped into the natural effects of the skill and helped it make the process go faster. A process that was innately tied to that of destruction.

The mana he had used back then wasn't the same gentle type as what he formed his bolts with. If his normal mana was like a serene lake normally, this mana had been a roaring maelstrom. Both were mana in its purest form, but one was peaceful while the other sought to destroy.

Opening his eyes, he exited meditation. He stood up as he lifted his hand and formed a ball of mana. He felt its serenity. He understood exactly how stupid he had been.

Mana was peaceful by nature. Its default form one of balance. If it weren't, the world would fall apart. It dominated the atmosphere and the air around him - the many affinities not changing that at all. To put it in other words... mana didn't have any inherent intent. It simply was.

The same was true for the mana he formed. The only difference being that it carried his own signature. His own 'Jake-affinity' if one will. When he threw a bolt of mana on anyone, all it did was to impact them with a bit of foreign mana temporarily. It wasn't even a proper attack. It barely held any kinetic energy, which was only because of exactly how much condensed mana there was.

Only his dark mana had some real effect. It was not because that was a proper attack either, but because of the innate qualities of dark mana and its ability to consume other mana types.

His use had been crude and borderline useless.

In his hand, the ball of mana formed into a bolt once more. He remembered the first time he saw a mana bolt being used during the tutorial's first day. He remembered how it had exploded upon impact and left a small burn mark.

The bolt in his hand began to slowly change into a blueish color. Had the other mana bolts ever been transparent? he asked himself. The answer, of course, was no.

Something in his mind had just clicked. Was it truly this simple? He wasn't even sure exactly how he had made the mana in his hand change. He just tried to mimic the feeling he got when he sought to destroy and refine the poison in his body and directed his mana into the structure it had been back then.

He began pouring more mana into the blue bolt in his hand. Its color remained unchanged, but he felt its power increase, and he knew it would explode upon impact with something. As a mana bolt was supposed to.

Jake had changed the construct and the purpose of the mana in his hand. No longer was it just a ball of mana thrown together, but a weapon created with intent.

The thought of trying to mix in the dark-affinity was quickly dispelled. Jake was already reaching as he was. The bolt in his hand was turning unstable by the second as he held onto it. A constant drain on his mana to keep it from either exploding or dispersing.

Looking out into the vast cloud continent before him, he spotted another Cloud Elemental - this one only at level 47. Around half the level of the one he had fought with the hawk earlier.

Turning to it, he said to the hawk: "Hey, I am going to do this one solo. I need to test something."

The hawk just looked at him like there was something wrong with his head. Hadn't he said not long ago to leave those cloud elementals alone?

"No judging," he chuckled as he saw its gaze - briefly reflecting on how funny it was that understanding the thoughts of Hawkie was easier than that of other humans.

Spreading his wings, he leaped off the cloud and glided down to the massive one below. Before even touching the ground, he threw the bolt he had been making in his hand - straight into the Cloud Elemental he had set his sights on earlier.

The bolt flew even faster than the ones he had thrown earlier. It hit the Cloud Elemental right in its chest, but this time it wasn't just harmlessly absorbed. Instead, it exploded in a blue explosion, pushing the elemental back and leaving a large hole in its cloudy body.

It quickly healed itself, but Jake wasn't discouraged. Quite the opposite. He felt a revitalized belief in his path. He had stumbled for a moment, sure, but it wasn't something he hadn't quickly fixed. It couldn't even be said he had really gone wrong. He had just been missing a piece of the puzzle.



Channeling mana into his two hands, he quickly formed two more bolts of mana - the speed confirming that his mana practice indeed hadn't been wasted at all. Throwing them both, two more explosions battered the elemental forcing it to reform its lost parts.

With a jolly smile, he kept bombarding the defenseless elemental a few more times before it became unable to heal. After the final bolt blew it up, the entire elemental dispersed, leaving only a small orb behind.

\*You have slain [Cloud Elemental – lvl 47] – Experience earned\*

From start to end, the elemental was unable to even move towards him. Each bolt was more potent than the one before it as he familiarized himself with forming them.

Mana practice on a lake with stones and forming strings had been useful. But nothing was better than exercise during live combat. His fighting instincts and innate desire to compete on full display as he pushed himself to continually improve.

He didn't even hesitate as he moved his gaze to get another elemental. This one being eleven levels higher than the one he had just slain.

Above, the hawk stared down at the crazed human as his hands crackled with mana, and he threw bolt after bolt at the elemental. It nearly felt bad for the poor things as they became fuel for the human's newfound power.

It recognized the bolts of mana. It knew how to use them too. A fundamental skill for any creature of the caster-archetype. Even those like itself that were only partially focused on the path of magic.

Yet his bolts were slightly different - not the first ones, mind you. But the ones he was beginning to throw now. They were changing from the basic construct to something more intricate and complicated. A rate of improvement that made the hawk doubt if this was indeed the same human that still looked like a newborn chick whenever he stupidly flapped his wings.